

THE DISCOURSE PARTICLES *NU/NO* AND *NO:* IN SURGUT KHANTY NARRATIVES

Zsófia Schön

LMU Munich, DE

zsafia.schoen@lmu.de

Abstract: This data-driven study investigates the differences between the discourse particle(s) *nu/no* and *no:* in Surgut (Yugan and Tromagan) Khanty narratives. The corpus-based approach first takes all occurrences of *nu*, *no*, and *no:* in the data into account to identify their functions according to their positions in the narrative structure. Further, it aims to answer the question if the three forms *nu*, *no*, and *no:* attested in Surgut Khanty are realisations of one discourse particle or if there are significant differences which allow for distinguishing two or three discourse particles. After analysing the data for sentence type, syntactic position, place in narrative structure, functions, it concludes that *no:*, with its affirmative readings, is a discourse particle on its own, while *nu* and *no* are too similar to be treated separately and can be considered alternate forms of one discourse particle.

Keywords: affirmation, modal reading, narrative structure, NU, Tromagan Khanty, Yugan Khanty

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2026.17.1.03>

1. Introduction

The present paper analyses the discourse particle *nu* and its variants *no* and *no:* in a minor Uralic language, Surgut Khanty. It focuses on the occurrence of the discourse particle in narratives (fairy tales and legends). Besides examining if *nu*, *no* and *no:* behave alike or differently, this paper investigates their functions in narratives according to several parameters, like their position in the narrative structure, their syntactical position, the sentence type in which they occur, and socio-linguistic characteristics of speakers (mono- vs. bilingual).

Discourse particles are defined as “small, uninflected words that are only loosely integrated into the sentence structure” (Fischer 2006: 4), including modal readings as well. Modal readings are seen as reflecting

the speaker's attitude (emotions, intentions, opinion) towards one element of the utterance or the context of it (Kugler 2000: 275–279). The narrative analytic method used is based on van Dijk's (1981) criteria to detect small units of narration, which was adopted and further developed by Nikitina (2024). In some cases, it was enriched by the informational structural classification of Lambrecht (1994).

The target language, Surgut Khanty, belongs to Eastern Khanty (Schön 2022: 90). It is used here as an umbrella term for two of its local variants: Yugan Khanty and Tromagan Khanty, and does not represent the literary version of the language.¹ Yugan Khanty is spoken along the rivers Bolshoy Yugan, Malyy Yugan, Salym, and Demyanka (the first three being left tributaries of the river Ob in North-West Siberia) by roughly 900 speakers (Csepregi 2017: 17). Their ways of life vary greatly, ranging from completely settled down to hunters and fishers in traditional villages or living semi-nomadic lives. Tromagan Khanty is spoken along the river Tromagan, a right tributary of the river Ob, by 870 speakers (Csepregi 2017: 17). They are mostly semi-nomadic reindeer herders, hunters, and fishers, or are urbanised. In the following, I will use *Surgut Khanty* to refer to Yugan Khanty and Tromagan Khanty simultaneously, or if the analysis applies to both of them, but for the sake of precision, I will refer to them separately in the description of the corpus, in the examples cited, and in the tables, or when I observe any differences between them.

Discourse particles in Surgut Khanty are a rather neglected part-of-speech. They mostly do not appear in language descriptions (Schön & Gugán 2022; Csepregi 2023), or if they do, they are categorised as particles in general or as interjections (Honti 1982: 86–87; Csepregi 2017: 205–210). However, taking a closer look at the data in available corpora (*OUDB Yugan Khanty corpus*, Csepregi et al. 2024) and after several years of consultations with native speakers (own field work between 2010–2017), over ten words could be classified as discourse particles in Surgut Khanty: *v*: 'well' (1),² *jv*: 'well' (6), *kutʃ* 'well', *qatʲv* 'well' (10),

1 For a general and a grammatical description see Schön & Gugán (2022).

2 The meanings indicated in this enumeration for the Surgut Khanty discourse particles are preliminary and highly tentative. Their functions have never been studied in detail. However, they appear in the examples cited in this paper, which is given in brackets. For *ʲaqv* and *ʲet* the meanings given are not precise, for *nu*, *no* and *no*: the precise meanings are missing purposely.

go on', *no* 'well', *no:* 'yes', *nu* 'well', *o:s* 'well', *t'aqv* 'well (7), (16), (19), (31), come on, please', *t'ε* 'so', *t'et* 'so (15), (18), (28), well', *t'i* 'well, so', *t'u:* 'so, well', *βəs* 'well (20), after all (9), indeed (30)', (see also Schön 2025).

For the present article, as a starting point in their detailed description, one of these particles was selected. Three forms of it (*nu*, *no*, *no:*) occur in the corpus used for this study. However, the Khanty etymological dictionary has separate entries for at least *nu* and *no*, and thus classifies them as separate discourse particles, while *no:* is not mentioned at all. Further, only *nu* is declared to be of Russian origin, while *no* as a discourse particle (called interjection) does not have any reference to a source (Steinitz et al. 1966–1995: 979). The question to be answered in this study is therefore, if *nu*, *no* and *no:* are three different discourse particles or not.

First, *nu*, *no* and *no:* are treated separately in order to determine if they only differ in their phonological realisation (closeness/openness: *nu~no*; vowel length: *no~no:*) or if there is a clear functional distribution between them. The question if they originate from one or two Russian borrowings or if they are a result of internal development is immaterial to this study.

As the analysis will show, there is no functional difference between *nu* and *no*, so they will be handled as variants of one particle from now on (Sections 3.2–3.5). Quite contrary to this, *no:* clearly has one distinctive function which *nu/no* does not have: affirmation (Section 3.1). Subsequently, only two distinct discourse particles are distinguished: *nu/no* and *no:*.

Excluded from this study are clear code-switching environments where *nu/no* is followed by a word in Russian (ex. *no sosed* 'well the neighbour', *no zato* 'well but' etc.) or collocations of *nu/no* with other Russian particles, adverbs etc. (like *no konečno* 'well certainly', *no poka* 'well while', *no značit* 'well this means' or *no/nu ladno* 'all right', *no/nu navernoe* 'well probably').

The glossing and translation strategy in this paper is as follows. While the general gloss PTCL is used for discourse particles, other words in the examples are presented with their meaning in the sentence or context as precisely as possible (ex. *pε:nə* 'and (3), then (27)'). As regards translations, I tried to provide maximally idiomatic ones that preserve as much as possible the original structure and reflect the functions of

the discourse particles. Thus the translations of *nu/no* and *no:* are many-fold (ex. *nu/no* ‘well (4), come on (6), so (16), then (20), for sure (25), after all (26), indeed (27)’ etc.). Relevant context is provided in two forms (preceding or following sentences in Surgut Khanty or a summary in English) depending on length and depth of additional information needed. If the original Surgut Khanty is cited in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), punctuation marks were left out, and the number of sentences as well as their structure only becomes visible in the translation.

2. Corpus and methodology

The corpus used for this study contains narrative texts collected mainly by the author from Yugan Khanty and Tromagan Khanty monolingual and bilingual speakers. The elicitation process and/or dialogues about the plot were provided as well and are part of the corpus. I collected the critical mass of these texts between 2010–2017 in Siberia. It consists of two separate parts representing the two varieties and contains 78,935 tokens in total.

The corpus of Yugan Khanty explored here has two different subcorpora with two different methodologies. One subcorpus is the *OUDB Yugan Khanty corpus (YK)* of the project *Ob-Ugric Database: analysed text corpora and dictionaries for less described Ob-Ugric dialects* (OUDB), containing 24,922 tokens of spoken narratives. These tales and legends show features of fixed narrative structures mixed with characteristics of spoken speech, such as speech disfluencies as well as structural repairs, false starts and discontinuity in the timeline of telling the plot. Furthermore, the elicitation process of the narratives is provided before some plots, as are comments or dialogues between the storyteller and other native speakers who were present, concerning the provenance of the narrative or unclear parts or unknown words; these additions occur after the tale or even during the narrative. I collected these texts between 2010–2016, partly together with a native speaker. 16 mono- or bilingual storytellers told 56 narratives. The material is available online.³

3 https://oudb.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/?abfrage=YK_corpus&subnavi=corpus_pub
(15 June, 2026)

The other Yugan Khanty subcorpus contains texts from a story-book “Märchen der Jugan-Chanten” (Schön forthcoming). The 27 tales and legends (14,369 tokens) represent Yugan Khanty narratives in a standardized manner; they adhere to the Surgut Khanty written language and are structurally sanitised (where necessary) and are orthographically represented in the Cyrillic alphabet. Four narratives were collected by Zoltán Nagy in the 1990’s, the remaining by myself, partly together with a native speaker, between 2010–2016 from 13 storytellers in total.

There is an overlap regarding the storytellers of the two Yugan Khanty subcorpora, but they are 21 in total, of whom five were monolingual. The data cited here from the Yugan Khanty subcorpora might differ from the first online publication as it was double-checked with the sound recording and in places corrected. When in doubt, the sound material is always cited here. Further, all examples given are unified in IPA.

The corpus of Tromagan Khanty used for this study remains so far unpublished and is part of the *Personal Archive of Zsófia Schön* (Schön 2017). The selection of 23 tales and legends (39,644 tokens) was collected between 2016–2017 in Siberia, partly together with a native speaker, from eight native speakers, one of them monolingual. The Tromagan Khanty narratives feature similar main protagonists as Yugan Khanty, but they are longer and their plots are more complex. All eight Tromagan Khanty storytellers tell tales more regularly and they tend to code-switch with Russian less often. Their narratives are more elaborated, and their speech more composed compared to those of the Yugan Khanty speakers. The Tromagan Khanty narratives in the corpus reflect spoken narratives, but they are nevertheless well-structured. There was no need to edit the story line. The first transcription was made by a native speaker with Cyrillic letters, but examples in this paper are presented in IPA. Due to discrepancies between the sound representation of Surgut Khanty using Cyrillic letters and IPA (esp. concerning vowel length), all data was checked with the original sound recordings.

It must be pointed out that there is a significant difference in the data collection method between the Yugan Khanty and the Tromagan Khanty part of the corpus, making it heterogenous. Yugan Khanty storytellers were often interrupted by the listeners or collectors, while Tromagan Khanty speakers were not. However, some of the Tromagan Khanty

storytellers struggle with the composition of the plot, which shows in remarks kept in the narrations.

The distribution of the data for both Yugan and Tromagan Khanty monolingual and bilingual speakers is relatively balanced. From the 39,291 Yugan Khanty tokens 24% are from monolingual speakers, and 76% from bilinguals, while from the 39,644 Tromagan Khanty tokens 32% are from monolingual speakers, and 68% from bilinguals.

Regarding all discourse particles in Yugan and Tromagan Khanty, there is an imbalance in the corpus data. The more than 1500 occurrences of the above listed 10+ discourse particles are attested mostly in Tromagan Khanty (over 60% of all discourse particles), where they dominantly occur in the narration itself (73% of all Tromagan Khanty data). Contrary to this, Yugan Khanty discourse particles occur more often in dialogues (constructed and free ones; 64% of all Yugan Khanty data).

As a first step in data selection, all occurrences of the discourse particle *nu/no* and *no:* were taken into account. The particle *no* is homonymous to an adversative conjunction *no* ‘but’ of Russian origin; these examples were omitted. The three forms are treated separately during the analyses in order to determine if they are different realisations of the same discourse particle or if they are separate ones. All data in code-switching environments was left out.

Several categorisations were used to analyse the occurrences of *nu/no* and *no:*, namely whether they are used by mono- or bilingual speakers, in which environment they occur, where they can be found in the narrative structure, what their syntactical position is and in which sentence type they are attested. Two of these criteria need more specification.

The sentences or utterances containing *nu/no* and *no:* were themselves categorised by their environments: narration, constructed dialogues between the protagonists, or free dialogues between the storytellers and native or non-native members of the audience. I rely here on the categories by Tannen (1986) in order to distinguish what is part of the narrative, the elicitation process, the narration itself or direct speech of a protagonist; for discourse particles, such a distinction is crucial. Due to the data collection methods of the Yugan Khanty material in particular, I relied on the distinctions by Tannen (1986) for free/real and constructed dialogues, instead of conventional terminology of direct speech, also in accordance with Denys Teptiuk’s paper in this special issue.

As for the categorisation of the narrative structure, the units elaborated by Nikitina (2024) were applied to the data. The positions *setting* and *continuation of setting*, *initial narrative event* and *narrative event*, *evaluation* and *continuation of evaluation* as well as *coda* (the end of the tale) were matched to each sentence. In Yugan Khanty and most of the Tromagan Khanty, settings as background information to the tale can appear not only at the beginning but also in the middle of a tale. Initial narrative events implement some sort of change of perspective and temporal progress, while narrative events constitute a course of events which build on each other and stand in temporal and causal succession. Evaluations and any kind of comments of the storyteller that interrupt the narration are quite common.

3. Analyses of *nu/no* and *no:* in the Surgut Khanty corpus

There are altogether 79 examples for *nu/no* and *no:* in the Surgut Khanty corpus (see Table 1). The above mentioned imbalance can be observed in the distribution of *nu/no* and *no:* between Yugan and Tromagan Khanty. Although there are more discourse particles altogether in Tromagan Khanty, the number of *nu/no* and *no:* is higher in Yugan Khanty, 67 and 12 occurrences respectively. There might be several reasons for this, e.g. a more regular language use and deeper storytelling skills of the Tromagan Khanty speakers, or the dominance of genuine discourse particles in Tromagan Khanty.

Table 1. Occurrences of *nu/no* and *no:* in the corpus.

	Surgut Khanty	
	Yugan Khanty	Tromagan Khanty
<i>nu</i>	25	2
<i>no</i>	31	10
<i>no:</i>	11	n. a.

The distribution of *nu/no* and *no:* according to the speaker's background (see Table 2) is for Yugan Khanty in relation with the data ratio between monolingual and bilingual speakers, but there is only one occurrence from a monolingual speaker in Tromagan Khanty.

Table 2. Occurrences of *nu/no* and *no:* regarding speaker background.

	Yugan Khanty speakers		Tromagan Khanty speakers	
	monolingual	bilingual	monolingual	bilingual
<i>nu</i>	9	16	n. a.	2
<i>no</i>	9	22	1	9
<i>no:</i>	2	9	n. a.	n. a.

The Yugan Khanty data for *nu/no* and *no:* is heterogenous: there are slightly more occurrences in narration than in free and constructed dialogues together. One third of the data with *nu/no* and *no:* is from monolingual speakers. 14 speakers out of 21 use *nu/no* or *no:* in their speech. Most occurrences are in sentence-initial position in declarative sentences but there are occurrences in interrogative, imperative and exclamative sentences in sentence-internal, final and in stand-alone positions as well. The picture changes when we take *no:* out of the equation, the data becomes more homogenous then.

In contrast, the form *no:* is not attested in Tromagan Khanty and the 12 occurrences of *nu/no* are quite uniform. They all appear in narrations, declarative sentences and in sentence-initial position. Only three out of eight Tromagan Khanty storytellers used *nu/no* (one monolingual and two bilingual speakers). The only variation this data shows is their place in the narrative structure: they are most frequent in narrative events (4/12) as well as in initial narrative events (3/12), and most rare in setting (1/12), continuation of setting (1/12), evaluation (1/12), or continuation of evaluation (1/12).

As *no:* is only attested in Yugan Khanty free dialogues, it will be handled separately in Section 3.1. The lack of *no:* in Tromagan Khanty might be explained by the fact that there is very little free dialogue in that part of the corpus and *no:* seems to appear dominantly there and fewer speakers seem to use *no/nu* in general. Furthermore, the functions of *no:* (3.1) are expressed in Tromagan Khanty by the collocations *tʲet tʲi:* ‘so this way’ or *tʲaʲqə tʲi:* ‘well so’. I do not consider it impossible that *no:* appears in Tromagan Khanty, but it is unlikely. As it does not occur in the corpus, it cannot be further evaluated at this point. The analyses from Section 3.2 on concentrates exclusively on *nu/no*.

Moreover *nu/no* appears in the corpus in free and constructed dialogues as well as in narration (see Table 3). These three categories are treated separately. *nu/no* in free or constructed dialogues are only attested in Yugan Khanty, so this will also be investigated on its

own (3.2). It is only *nu/no* in narratives where an analysis for Surgut Khanty in general can be presented (*nu* in 3.3.1 and *no* in 3.3.2).

Table 3. Occurrences of *nu/no* in the corpus.

	Surgut Khanty					
	Yugan Khanty			Tromagan Khanty		
	narration	constructed dialogue	free dialogue	narration	constructed dialogue	free dialogue
<i>nu</i>	20	4	1	2	n. a.	n. a.
<i>no</i>	17	5	9	10	n. a.	n. a.

3.1. *no:* in free dialogues in Yugan Khanty

After a short, general description of *no:*, both functions are described as detailed as the data allows – first the affirmative one as an answer to polar questions as in (1), (2); second the positive reaction to an interruption as in (3).

The 11 occurrences of *no:* with a long or overlong and often highly accentuated vowel all appear exclusively in free dialogues and in declarative sentences (1)–(3). The data is mostly from bilingual speakers, but usage from monolingual speakers is also attested. *no:* can be in sentence-initial (2) and even final positions, but in the corpus *no:* mostly stands alone (1), (3).

Regarding the function of *no:*, it expresses affirmation as an answer to a polar question. In (1), *no:* occurs in the elicitation process before the actual storytelling between the native speaker A and the storyteller B. *Little Cranberry* is one of the most popular Yugan Khanty plots and there's a challenge to tell it with as few sentences as possible. That is why A is asking about the plot relatively harshly and B acts surprised that she should tell it.

(1) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1493)

A: *v: nuŋ pɛ:n səmali pɛ:n po:mi mu:ntəli əntə βu:tɛ βəs qoti jiy*

‘A: Well, don’t you know [the tale] Little Cranberry and Grass Bundle or what happened [= what the hell]?’

B: *v: tʰu: v:j mɔ:nʲtʲ-əli*
PTCL DET.DIST small tale-DIM.MEL

‘B: Well, that short little tale?’

A: *no:*

PTCL

‘A: Yes.’

In (2), 'member of the audience A is not sure if the plot ended or not and asks about it directly. Storyteller B answers with a whole sentence, using *no:* in sentence initial position.

(2) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1542)

A: *v:rit-ət* *t'etti*
amount-SG<3SG is_here

'A: Is this the end?'

B: *no:* *v:rit-ət* *totti*
PTCL amount-SG<3SG is_there

'B: **Yes**, that's all of it. [= Yes, that's it.]'

Besides the affirmative reading in answers to polar questions, *no:* can express confirmation or an other form of wise positive reaction to an interruption. In (3), A ends the tale by summarizing the consequences of the closing event. While being burnt alive, the Menk⁴ sends a curse, namely that mosquitos and gnats shall fly out of his sparks and ashes. The flying of the pests is repeated in a slightly different way by B in the audience, underlining the essence of the end of the plot. In this repetitive structure, the storyteller reacts with *no:* as an expression of agreement.

(3) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1607)

A: *pə:nə* *kə:jiŋi* *pətəm* *tut* *sp:t* *tʃi* *porəytəy*
and gnat gadfly there as MAN.PROX fly.PST.3SG

'A: And gnats, gadflies flew there so.'

B: *kə:jiŋi* *porəytəy*
gnat fly.PST.3SG

'B: Gnats flew.'

A: *no:*

PTCL

'A: **That's that.**'

4 A *Menk* is a male giant monster living in the forest, a figure often appearing in Surgut Khanty tales. He is strong, eats humans and animals, but he is not clever and is often tricked by the main protagonist.

3.2. *nu/no* in Yugan Khanty free and constructed dialogues

Altogether there are 19 occurrences in Yugan Khanty of *nu/no* in free and constructed dialogues – 53% of them in free dialogues, 47% in constructed ones. With three exceptions (6), (7), (9) they all stand in utterance-initial positions (4), (5), (8), (10), (11). The occurrences in constructed dialogues are framed or not framed (5)–(7), (11). In order to analyse similarities and discrepancies between *nu* and *no* in dialogues, I will first present *nu* in free, then in constructed dialogues, both times with a general data description to be followed by the functions detected. Then I will present *no* in the same contexts, providing a general description and presenting its specific functions.

The only example for *nu* in a free dialogue (4) is from a bilingual storyteller A, who describes a house which the main protagonist sees. A uses a special expression in the first line, deliberately not naming the owner of the house, but she is interrupted by one of the native speakers from the audience, who identifies the object and its owner, leaving the storyteller no choice but to confirm it. The storyteller agrees and repeats the solution introduced by *nu* as an explanation of the hidden vocabulary said before. This short dialogue is judged not to be part of the narration, as the first line alone would be enough for the native audience to know what is being talked about.

- (4) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1607)
 [The main protagonist arrives to a house.]
 A: *o:βərnəm o:βər qv:t qomətnəm qomət qv:t*
 ‘A: It is such a high, high house, such a wide, wide house.’
 B: *mɛŋk i:ki qv:t*
 ‘B: The house of the Menk.’
 A: *mɛxm nu mɛŋk i:ki qv:t*
 mhm PTCL Menk Sir⁵ house
 ‘A: Mhm, **well**, the house of the Menk.’

5 The gloss ‘Sir’ for *i:ki* might be unusual. Most commonly it means ‘old man’, ‘man’ or ‘husband’, but it may also be used as a term for a respected, older male relative (Steinitz et al. 1966–1995: 34). In examples (4) and (19) this last meaning was adopted in the glossing, as a sign of respect before the Menk but it is absent in the translation. Other sources may judge *mɛŋk i:ki* as a compound or the last part indicating the gender of the Menk (Csepregi 2017: 70, 89, 91).

The four examples with *nu* from constructed dialogues used in the speech of protagonists appear in four different tales told by the same monolingual storyteller. Two of them appear in exclamative sentences in sentence initial (5) or internal (6) position. One of them in an imperative sentence, one in a declarative one.

In one of the occurrences of *nu* from constructed dialogues, it expresses the surprise of a protagonist when he finds out that a bird ate his food (5) (modal reading).

(5) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1601)

[The little bird enters the house of the Menk, sees the elk fat in the pot and eats it. When the Menk arrives home, the bird can not leave and hides.]

nə:j ultə jiy pə:n kətət muβutijə n'ayləkint t'u:ti pi:təŋkəli

'He [= the Menk] began to light up the fire. And he dipped his hand into something. That is that little bird.'

nu	<i>mə:</i>	<i>połʲi-i</i>	<i>pu:t-əle-m</i>	<i>nəŋn</i>
PTCL	1SG	elk_fat-PROPR	pot-DIM.MEL-SG<1SG	2SG.LOC
<i>noq</i>	<i>tʲiri-ji</i>		<i>βo:ri-ji</i>	
PFV	eat_up_fully.PST-PASS.3SG		eat_up_fully.PST-PASS.3SG	

'Well, my little pot of elk fat has been eaten up fully, eaten up fully by you!'

In two examples, *nu* has the function of prompting action, a common function of *nu* in dialogues in other languages as well (Auer & Maschler 2016: 14). But in one of the examples (6), *nu* appears in sentence-internal position, which is unexpected.

(6) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1615)

[All the relatives are moving from their place in the forest to the winter settlement, but the Son-in-law from the Ob doesn't want to leave and forces the brother of his wife to stay with him, by saying the following:]

jə: nəŋ e:t mənə

'Well, you, don't go!'

<i>əjqə</i>	nu	<i>mi:n</i>	<i>tʲit</i>	<i>qu:tʲi-tʲ-əmən</i>
together	PTCL	1DU	here	stay_behind-PRS-1DU

'Come on, let us remain here together!'

In (7), *nu* even occurs in a speech disfluency environment, in a declarative sentence in a sentence-internal position. The monolingual

storyteller does not finish the word *məf(-)*, which might be a local adverbial, but instead rephrases the utterance.

(7) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1637)

<i>tʲaqɛ</i>	<i>nɯŋ</i>	<i>mɛː</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>məf</i>	...	<i>mɛː</i>	<i>mən-t-əm</i>
PTCL	2SG	1SG	PTCL	n._k.	...	1SG	go-PRS-1SG

‘Well you I **well** *məf*... I go.’

In dialogues, *no* appears more often in Yugan Khanty in the corpus than *nu*: *no* occurs nine times in free dialogues from five speakers, two of them being monolingual. All the data of *no* in free dialogues is in declarative sentences and *no* stands in sentence-initial position (8), (10) except for one occurrence (9), where it is sentence-final.

Example (8) reflects one of the most common functions of *no* in Yugan Khanty dialogues, namely that of an explanation. Often something from a previous sentence is repeated and elaborated in more detail or a piece of information is added. In (8), the storyteller begins to tell the tale with a rare collective suffix (-*p*) not known by A, a foreign researcher listening to the tale, and she interrupts the narration in order to get some clarification for the word. The storyteller B struggles with it and repeats the construction several times in different contexts.

(8) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1507)

A: *i:kip*
 ‘A: Ikip? [= What does ikip mean?]
 B: *i:mip nʲit ... nʲitə*
 ‘B: Four wives... four.’

<i>no</i>	<i>o:s</i>	<i>jɛ:y</i>	<i>nʲitə</i>	<i>i:mi-p</i>	<i>i:ki-p</i>
PTCL	again	people	four	woman-COLL	man-COLL

‘**Well** again, they were four people – wives and husbands.’

The few occurrences of *no* in sentence-final position include example (9). At the end of the tale, the storyteller B is interrupted by a native speaker from the audience asking to clarify on expression that occurred in the plot earlier (a stone turned into a big rock as an obstacle protecting the main protagonists). It seems that the person asking did not understand at first the word *tʲu:rmək* ‘rock’, but after the short explanation of the plot, she does. She repeats the construction used and adds *no* to show her opinion. Such examples are overall rare in the data.

(9) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1660)

A: *mʊβuti tʉ:t tʉ:rmək*‘A: What is that: *tjurmak*?’B: *tʉ: kəβ li:stən kəβ βəs tʉ: pu:rəf i:mijən tʉ: u:l toj ɛləpti jəkuttəy*
pə:n kəβ tʉ:rmək-kə jiy tʉ: ke ... kəβ

‘B: That stone, it is a rock after all. It was thrown above the head of that old woman. And that stone turned into the rock, that st... stone.’

A: *tʉ:rmək-kə jiy* **no**
rock-TRNS become.PST.3SG PTCL‘A: It became a rock, **indeed**.’

The only occurrence of *no* in a free dialogue with a turn-initiating reading introducing a new topic is shown in (10). In an elicitation session that lasted several hours, the native researcher A tries to get the monolingual storyteller B to confirm ethnographical information and she begins the sentence with *no* introducing a new topical sequence (see also Auer & Maschler 2016: 16).

(10) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID094)

B: *qatʉ mʊβ βer pətən toβə laŋ tam tʉ: tʉ:tʉ:tʉ:tʉ:βoləm qv:t əjnəm*
βalləy jəkkən tʉ:tyə tʉ:ti laŋi tʉ: qv:t

‘I wonder why he even went in there? It was after all the house of his late grandfather! Both of his grandparents had died already! So many others went in that house.’

A: **no** *tə:pət v:l-ət jə-ləq qan-ləy*
PTCL seven year-INSC become-PTCP.NEG cleave-PTCP.NEG
ot-ət qu:ntə v:səl qu:j-l-i
thing-INSC if without_owner leave-PRS-PASS.3SG
qu:ntə tə:pət v:l-ət tʉ:t
if seven year-INSC PRON.DIST
jə-ləq qan-ləy otʰ-nə
become-PTCP.NEG cleave-PTCP.NEG thing-LOC
laŋ-l-i
enter-PRS-PASS.3SG

6 The *jələq qanləy ot* ‘Evil Being; lit. not-becoming, not-cleaving thing’ is a so called *Zwischenwesen* [intermediate being], which neither lives in the world of the humans nor in that of the spirits or Gods, but somewhere in between, and has the ability to travel between the worlds. For further details see Schön 2020: 351.

‘A: **Well**, if after seven years the Evil Being – if it [= a house] is left without an owner –, so after seven years the Evil Being enters it.’

B: *məttə*.

‘B: They say so.’

As discourse particle in constructed dialogues, *no* is only used by Yugan Khanty-Russian bilingual speakers in the corpus. The five occurrences all stand in sentence-initial or utterance-initial position and have similar functions to those in the free dialogues. They can prompt action, introduce an explanation, with or without repetition from the context. Interestingly, there is one expression *no jim* ‘well fine’ (OUDB ID1533) which is a calque of Russian *nu xorošo* ‘well good’ (see also Bolden 2016: 74).

One additional function of *no* is attested, namely that of opening a conversation with somebody (11).

(11) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1650)

torumnə qv:nənə vʲet kəntʃʲfʲe: βeri əj tʲe:tnə tʲe:s jʲe:γ joytət tʲe:s jʲe:γ joytət
 ‘He was beginning to get searched by the king. One day the troop people came. The troop people came.’

no muβ pɛβət ot-γən βos-ittən
 PTCL what_kind_of clink thing-DU COP-SG<2DU
 “‘Well, what kind of clinking creatures are you?’”

3.3. *nu/no* in narration in Surgut Khanty

As the functions of *no/nu* in Yugan and Tromagan Khanty narration are similar and as the data situation is unbalanced, *no/nu* will be presented as *nu* and *no* in Surgut Khanty in order to concentrate on their properties on their own.

In the corpus, 49 occurrences in total are attested for *no/nu* in narration – 37 in Yugan Khanty and 12 in Tromagan Khanty. Almost all examples are in declarative sentences; there are only three exceptions where they occur in the same Yugan Khanty idiomatic expression in, once with *nu* (14) and twice with *no* (26), (27), all three with a modal reading in evaluation.

Regarding the syntactic position, as expected, the sentence/utterance-initial position prevails, but there is one example in sentence-internal

(25e) and one in sentence-final position (26), both with *no* and a modal reading.

Concerning the position of *nu/no* in the narrative structure, it can appear in each position. In 3.3.1–2 the following positions are illustrated: setting continues (12), (23), initial narrative event (15), (16), (21), (22), (25), (28)–(30), (32), narrative event (17)–(19), (31), (33), closing narrative event (20), evaluation (14), (24), (26), (27) and evaluation continues (13).

In the following two Sections 3.3.1–2, the two forms of the discourse particle *nu* and *no* are presented first with a general description of their use in the corpus (position, sentence type, speakers) and then paragraph-by-paragraph, different functions are analysed and illustrated in detail with their position in the narrative structure.

3.3.1. *nu* in Surgut Khanty narration

The 22 occurrences of *nu* in Surgut Khanty (20 from Yugan Khanty and two from Tromagan Khanty) all stand in utterance-initial position of declarative sentences (12), (13), (15)–(20), except for one example in sentence-internal position (21), and one in an interrogative sentence (14), but with various positions in the narrative structure. They were produced by monolingual as well as bilingual speakers. Several different functions could be determined.

One of the detected functions is to introduce any kind of explanation, clarification, or additional information to better understand a narrative's background. Such an example is shown in (12), taking place already in the second sentence of the tale. The storyteller continues the setting by explaining the story's central point: everything the three brothers undertake in the plot happens because of their financial situation.

- (12) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID322)

əj tɛ:tnə qo:təm lɛlisət βolət

‘Once there lived three brothers.’

nu *tʉ:mint* *kɛn'vɛr* *jv:y*

PTCL such poor people

‘Well they were such poor people.’

The other occurrences of *nu* being classified with explanatory meaning appear either in evaluations or continuations of evaluations (13), reflecting some additional information with or without partly repeating what has already been told. This is shown in example (13), where *nu* occurs in the second sentence, an evaluation by the storyteller, who seems to have forgotten how the plot goes on, and ponders on it. He openly explains having difficulties remembering the storyline.

- (13) Tromagan Khanty (Schön 2017: ID124)

i:l ser o:s qolnə sv:yət

‘Now, wait a minute, how again?’

nu *mɐ:* *əjnɐm* *tʃi* *toɣə* *ʃorəɣ-l-əm* *tʃiməl*
PTCL 1SG all MAN.PROX there forget-PRS-1SG a_little

‘Well, I completely forgot it here [= how the tale continues], a little bit.’

There is only one occurrence of *nu* in Yugan Khanty showing a modal reading (14), which appears in the evaluative part of the tale directly after a constructed speech, reflecting the narrator’s emotions.

- (14) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID322)

nu *tʃu:* *po:p* *qotə* *jə-l*
PTCL DET.DIST Orthodox_priest what become-PRS.3SG

‘What choice does that priest have, **indeed?**’

Here, in example (14), the storyteller is wondering about what the Orthodox priest could do after his young companion tricked him into allegedly killing a local man whose community demands gifts as compensation, otherwise they would kill him. The verbal construction *qotə jə-* at the end of the example is idiomatic, having a meaning along the lines of ‘What the hell?’, ‘What can one do?’, ‘What happens to someone?’ (see also examples (26), (27) with *no*, 3.3.2).

Occurring in a declarative sentence and sentence-initial position as well as in the initial narrative event part of a tale, *nu* often introduces a new episode with a new topic (15), marking boundaries in the structure of the narratives.

- (15) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID103)

tʲet ottə tʲu: mɔ:j-po:ri jɛnʲtʲtʲɛɣə lɛ:jɣəmət antɛ mʊβə ji:məŋ lɛ:pət ji:nʲtʲət
mʊβə qo:ləm lɛ:pət ji:nʲtʲət tʲu: mɔ:j-po:ri

‘So, actually, they begun to celebrate the wedding! Whether they feasted for a holy week or they drank for three weeks at that wedding.’

nu *tʲu:* *qo:* *kəntʲɛntə-min* *janqit-ət*
 PTCL DET.DIST man hunt-CVB go_to_do_smth-PRS.3SG

‘Well, that man left to hunt.’

Interestingly, if *nu* occurs among the examples in the position of the initial narrative event at the beginning of a new episode, its function is not always introducing a new topic, it can stand for topic continuity if after a constructed speech it repeats as part of the narration what was said before (16).

- (16) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID322)

o:j tʲaqɛ mättə v:təm βɛr tʲu: jɛ:y mättə tɛ: o:s jəmɛt o:jmət o:s mʊβəli
antɛ βv:ɣlət tot βɛlit tarət-parət βv:ɣlət nʊŋ ni:ŋkte. nʲaβit-u:tʲət o:s v:
to: mättə, u:lə βɛllo nʊŋ

‘“Ah, well, they say, it is a bad thing! Those people, look, they are again going very crazy. They are again asking for things. Reindeers and such alike, they demand from you. More meat and food. Well, truly, they say they will kill you otherwise.”’

nu *tʲu:* *po:p-nə* *o:s* *nʲaβi-jɛt*
 PTCL DET.DIST Orthodox_priest-LOC too meat-INSCL
tarpar-ət-ət *u:tʲ-ət*
 and_all_kind_of_things-PL-INSCL and_suchalike-INSCL
ki:t-ət
 send.PST-PASS.3PL

‘So they were sent with food, things, and everything else by that priest.’

This function of topic continuity does not have to stand in initial narrative event position, it can also occur in the course of the narration repeating what has been said (17), (19) or as part of the narrative event (18).

- (17) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1660)

mə: mənłəm

‘‘I will leave!’’

mən

‘He left.’

nu *mən*

PTCL go.PST.3SG

‘Well, he left.’

- (18) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1650)

*torəm qv:n qo:łəm εβi tajet tʲet tʲu: torəmnəm qv:nnəm mɔ:jinttəy tʲet
lə:jəməy*

‘The king has three daughters. So he has begun to ask for one of them for marriage from that king.’

nu *torəm-nə qv:n-nə⁷ tʲet εβi-jet*

PTCL world-LOC ruler-LOC PTCL daughter-INSC

ε:rəyt-i

promise.PST-PASS.3SG

‘Well then he was promised one of the daughters by the king.’

Further in (19), *nu* stands in the middle of the narration in a narrative event, assuring topic continuity. The lexical subject (*məηk i:ki* ‘Menk’) and the verb (*joyət* ‘come’) is repeated overtly with the additional information that the threat has indeed arrived.

- (19) Tromagan Khanty (Schön 2017: ID199)

tfaqə mətə mərə βoli pə:nəpə məηk i:ki tʲi joyət tfaqə

‘Well, some time passed, and then the Menk came, however.’

nu *məηk i:ki tʲe:γə joyət tfaqə*

PTCL Menk Sir here come.PST.3SG PTCL

‘Well, the Menk came here then.’

7 The expression *torəm qv:n* means lit. ‘worldly ruler’, but it is translated due to pragmatic reasons as ‘king’, because it does not depict the highest power of the world, but the highest leader of a town or a territory. The word *qv:n* itself means ‘tsar, emperor, ruler’ and is etymologically derived Tatar (Steinitz et al. 1966–1995: 504). The suffixation of the compound on both of its parts (*torəmnə qv:nnə* instead of *torəm qv:nnə* as awaited) is quite unusual. It might be idiolectal, but it was judged grammatically correct by other native speakers.

In such constructions as seen in (17) and (19), where *nu* assures topic continuity with the repetition from the previous sentence, a recapitulative tail-head linkage construction (Olguín Martínez 2023: 403) is used. The tail (first sentence) and the head (second sentence) are linked to each other not only by the repetition of the verbal element, but also with the discourse particle *nu*. There are two more examples in the corpus of tail-head linkage, both in Yugan Khanty and Tromagan Khanty, one in a narrative event as shown here and one is a continuation of the setting.

The only occurrence of *nu* that does not fit into the classification above is shown in example (20), where it occurs with a closing or summarizing narrative event.

(20) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID029)

ex, tʰu: tʰβərper-qu:tfper qo:, v:jqo: tʰu: laβ o:βtiʝe laqqint i:tpə jaqənəm laβ ketəryəltəltəy.

‘Eh, that Tuwetpar-kuchpar-qo, the young man sat on that horse and brought the horse immediately home.’

nu	<i>laβ</i>	<i>laβ</i>	<i>mes</i>	<i>taj-tə</i>	<i>qv:t-v</i>	<i>tʰu:</i>
PTCL	horse	horse	cow	have-PTCP.PRS	house-LAT	DET.DIST
	<i>laβ-əl</i>	<i>εsləmt-ətəy</i>	<i>u:lə</i>	<i>əlint</i>		
	horse-SG<3SG	let.PST-SG<3SG	down	lie.PST.3SG		

‘Well, the horse, he led his horse into the stable of horses and cows. He lied down.’

The last function of *nu* is exclusively found in Yugan Khanty: *nu* appears three times in a speech disfluency environment, in all cases in initial narrative events. Two times it is followed by the filler word *ottə* ‘um’ (21) and one time by self-repair using the correct verb form (***nu*** *βij βijilt tʰβ ontv* ‘Well, she took, she took a lot of it, probably’ OUDB ID1621). It can introduce correction or hesitation (21).

(21) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1644)

<i>tʰe:t</i>	<i>ottə</i>	<i>tʰu:</i>	<i>βer</i>	<i>βot</i>	<i>pu:r</i>	<i>qatət-nə</i>
here	um	DET.DIST	thing	be.PST.3SG	next	day-LOC
nu	<i>otti</i>	<i>tʰu:</i>	<i>i:...</i>	<i>i:mi</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>i:mi</i>
PTCL	um	DET.DIST	i...	woman	...	woman
	<i>o:s</i>	<i>mən</i>	<i>toyə</i>			
	again	go.PST.3SG	there			

‘Here, um, that thing was, the next day, **well** um, that i... woman... the nephew of the woman went there again.’

3.3.2. *no* in Surgut Khanty narration

In Surgut Khanty narration, *no* is attested 27 times (17 times in Yugan Khanty and ten times in Tromagan Khanty). Most of the examples occur in declarative sentences in utterance-initial position (22)–(24), (28)–(31), except for three examples with modal reading (25)–(27) and the four occurrences in a speech-disfluency environment (32), (33). Several functions were detected. The only variation, aside from their function, is their structural position: they occur in all positions.

The explanatory reading of *no* can occur everywhere in the narrative structure, due to its ability to clarify or straighten out what was said before. Sometimes, with clear reference to the context before, like in the first sentence of a tale as an insertion, even prosodically separated, when the storyteller has to reveal the meaning of a word, for example, in (22), the main protagonist. She is first introduced with the wording *əj ju:s i:mi* ‘one old woman of past times’, however, the storyteller feels the need to point out that she is from the old times, but she is young, thus she is clarifying what kind of woman by changing the word *i:mi* ‘woman, old woman, wife’ to the word *ne:* meaning only ‘woman’. This is one of two occurrences of *no* in the first sentence of a narrative itself in the whole corpus.

(22) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1538)

<i>əj</i>	<i>məte</i>	<i>ʔe:t-nə</i>	<i>əj</i>	<i>ju:s</i>	<i>i:mi</i>	<i>no</i>
one	some_kind_of	time-LOC	one	old_times	old_woman	PTCL
<i>əj</i>	<i>ne:</i>	<i>mo:q-əl-nət</i>	<i>tu:ʔestə-t-ət</i>	<i>tʃit</i>		
one	woman	child-SG<3SG-COM	misbehave-PRS-3PL	MAN.PROX		

‘Once there was an old woman of past times, **well** one woman, she is misbehaving with her child like this.’

əj i:mi v:jmo:qəli tajet a əj i:mi mo:q v:r tajet qo:ttət əj soŋnəm
 ‘One woman has a small child. And another woman has many children. They’re running around all the time.’

One other occurrence for the explanatory reading is quite similar to (13) for *nu* – the storyteller tries to gather the storyline and verbalises that now she will think about it a little. A third example (23) is not interrupting the plot in the same way but tries to clarify in the setting what has happened to the people by explaining the consequences of the action of the evil protagonist.

- (23) Tromagan Khanty (Schön 2017: ID126)

[The half-faced evil woman was going around the human villages and eating five people at a time.]

no qantəy qo: jəmət tʃimət-γə jəy
 PTCL Khanty man very little-TRNS become.PST.3SG
 ‘Well, there were very few people left.’

As implied above, the modal interpretation of *no* shows variation. Two occurrences are in declarative sentences, one in sentence-initial (24), one in sentence-internal position (25), and two other occurrences are in interrogative sentences in sentence-initial (27) and sentence-final (26) position. Regarding their position in the narrative structure, they either appear in a remark of the storyteller (evaluation) (24), (26), (27) or in a new episode introduced by a temporal *əj tɐ:tnə* ‘one day’ (initial narrative event) (25).

In example (24), *no* is reflecting the opinion of the storyteller in the second-to-last sentence of the tale as an evaluation. He judges the behaviour of the main protagonists, who did not understand the meaning of their action: they all claim victory for themselves, even though they only succeeded together.

- (24) Tromagan Khanty (Schön 2017: ID126)

[The four main protagonists have killed the evil woman and are quarrelling about who did the better job.]

no təy tʃi tɐ:yi əntə toŋəmt-il əj
 PTCL 3PL DET.PROX place NEG understand.PST-SG<3PL one
βəβ-ət noq pə pi:t-ət
 force-INSC up EMPH fall.PST-3PL
 ‘Indeed, they did not understand this circumstance: they won together.’

In the whole corpus, *no* appears only one time in sentence-internal position (25), but due to the limited data, one should not exclude the possibility that it would be admissible in this position. The proposed reading for *no* in (25) is the modal one, reflecting reassurance by the storyteller in the repetitive structure of the narration. In the first line of (25), the arrival of a background protagonist (the Son of the Wind seeking revenge) is introduced by the wind becoming stronger (*βv:tyə jɪtɐ: jɪy* ‘it started to become windy’). Almost the same expression for this event appears four sentences later, the repetition (*o:s jimət βv:tyə*

jiy ‘it became extremely windy again’) introduced by *no* reflecting the opinion of the storyteller. As the new development is introduced by the temporal expression (*aj tɛ:tnə* ‘one day’), *no* is judged to have a modal reading.

(25) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1635)

*aj tɛ:tnə ke:mən βv:tɣə jitɛ: jiy tɬu: ne: jɛ:stət tʲit mətʲə mɐ: le:lem βv:t pay
ottə mənmet pətəɣi pirɣi ki:rəytəɣ*

‘One day it began to be windy outside. That woman says: “This – she says – is my older brother, the Son of the Wind.” Um. [Shortly] after she went out, she turned around.’

aj tɛ:t-nə ke:mən no o:s jimət βv:t-ɣə
one time-LOC outside PTCL again very wind-TRNS

jiy

become.PST.3SG

‘One day outside it, **for sure**, became extremely windy again.’

The two other examples of *no* in interrogative sentences with modal reading are quite similar to the one modal occurrence of *nu* (14). Namely, they appear in a sentence with the idiomatic construction *qotə jə-* ‘what happens? what can one do?’. One time interrupting the storyline (26), creating an even stronger discontinuation of the plot by reflecting the opinion of the storyteller, and the other time after constructed speech of the protagonist (27) (see also *nu* in the same structural position in (14)). In both (26) and (27), *no* reflects the narrator’s attitude (wondering about the situation of the protagonists).

(26) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID321)

[One brother pricks out the eyes of his brother, brings him into the forest and leaves him there alone.]

o:s tɬuβ tɬu: sem-ləɣ qotə jə-l no
PTCL 3SG DET.DIST eye-CAR what become-PRS.3SG PTCL

‘Oh well, he, the blind man, what will he do, **after all**?’

v:məst

‘He stays there.’

- (27) Yugan Khanty (Schön forthcoming: ID118)

[The main hero has stolen the Sun and the Moon and tells the people to go to the king and tell him he will only give them back if the king gives him his beloved daughter.]

no *qotə* *jə-l-ət* *pɐ:nə*
 PTCL what become-PRS-3PL then
 ‘What else can they do **indeed**?’

Several occurrences of *no* introduce a new episode in sentence initial position and at the same time a new topic, like in (28), (29) as part of an initial narrative event of the narrative structure. It is not unusual that several particles and/or demonstratives appear in the same sentence, all having different functions. In (28), after the two male protagonists have resolved their issues and one of them was punished but left alive due to the intervention of his father-in-law, a new storyline begins with *no*. A similar introduction of a new storyline is presented in (29), where after the storyline was interrupted by an insertion (evaluation) providing the protagonist’s name, the main protagonist leaves. This is judged as an initial narrative event.

- (28) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1635)

[The protagonists quarrel but finally resolve their issues.]

no *tʲet* *tʲi:* *jim-ɣə* *βot-tɐ:* *jiɣ-ət*
 PTCL PTCL MAN.PROX good-TRNS live-INF begin.PST-3PL
 ‘**Well** then so they have begun to live a good life.’

- (29) Tromagan Khanty (Schön 2017: ID167)

[People are leaving, but his younger brother is staying. The name of his older brother is Cedar cone peeling white hero.]

no *tʲu:* *nɐ:r* *βer-tə* *ne:β* *ort*
 PTCL DET.DIST cedar_cone do-PTCP.PRS white hero
tʲi *mən-l*
 MAN.PROX go-PRS.3SG
 ‘**Well** that Cedar cone peeling white hero is so leaving.’

In (30), the two protagonists discuss in detail what to do and how. After the constructed speech, a sentence introduced by *no* affirms that they leave by introducing a new episode. Such repetitive structures,

with or without iteration, sometimes almost word-for-word repetitions or even with lexical variation, are often found in Surgut Khanty narratives to highlight action.

(30) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1607)

[The little bird tries to convince the Menk not to eat him. He offers the giant to give him his sister if he spares him. The Menk asks how to follow him, as he is like a human with legs and has no wings, like the bird. The bird answers to follow his trace:]

əj pojtəŋəm u:tətə tu:təm məy... məy o:yti: jərkeptəmin

‘I will bring downward one wing to the land... I will draw a line down on the surface of the land.’

no	<i>tojunə</i>	<i>qu:ntə</i>	<i>mən-əyən</i>	<i>βəs</i>
PTCL	so	when	go.PST-3DU	PTCL

‘Well, this way then they left indeed.’

In narrative events, *no*, like *nu*, can stand for topic continuity. This function is not attested elsewhere in the narrative structure. In (31), one of the protagonists talks about what she will do, and after she finishes announcing her intention to leave, she leaves. This last part is introduced with *no* directly after the constructed dialogue. The repetition and the reinforcement that the plan is realised assures topic continuity.

(31) Yugan Khanty (OUDb ID1660)

mə: tʲaqə mənłəm βəs tʲe:βər mo:qqən o:s qoqqə pi:ttəyən nʲo:ttəyətəm
mə:

‘“I, well then, am leaving! Whether the rabbit children are already far away. I will catch up with them.”’

no	<i>mən-t</i>
PTCL	go-PRS.3SG

‘Well, she is leaving.’

Like *nu*, also *no* is attested only in speech disfluency environments in the Yugan Khanty data. The four examples introduce either hesitation (32) or word finding problems with self-correction (33).

- (32) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1459)
mətə marə βot-t-i pə:n tʰu: ... tʰu:
some time live-PRS-PASS.3SG and DET.DIST ... DET.DIST
mɔ:tʃ ni:ŋ-əł nɐ:j-n ... nɐ:j-n no βəs
guest woman-SG<3SG fire-LOC ... fire-LOC PTCL or
eta ... tʰu: qv:t nɐ:j-nə ti:β-i
[Ru. this] ... DET.DIST house fire-LOC burn.PST-PASS.3SG
‘She lives some time and that... that female guest by the fire... by the fire,
well, or this... that house was consumed by the fire.’
- (33) Yugan Khanty (OUDB ID1615)
tʰi: v:j mo:q ... no v:j q ... i:mi-t
DET.PROX young child ... PTCL young ma... ... wife-SG<3SG
monʲi-nə βɛr-t-i
younger_brother-LOC say-PRS-PASS.3SG
‘This young child... **well** young ma... his wife’s younger brother asks.’

3.4. Short summary of *nu/no* in Surgut Khanty narration

The occurrence of *nu* and *no* in the narrative structure in Surgut Khanty is quite similar (see Table 4). However, due to a small data set, not all positions can be compared to the same extent.

Table 4. Place of *nu/no* in narrative structure.

	Surgut Khanty narration									
	Yugan Khanty narration					Tromagan Khanty narration				
	setting	initial narrative event	narrative event	coda	evaluation	setting	initial narrative event	narrative event	coda	evaluation
<i>nu</i>	2	10	5	n. a.	3	n. a.	n. a.	1	n. a.	1
<i>no</i>	2	5	5	2	3	2	3	3	n. a.	2

In the position of the initial narrative event, both *nu* and *no* in both Yugan and Tromagan Khanty often introduce a new episode (15), (28)–(30). However, there are exceptions for both *nu* and *no*, as shown in examples (16), (21,) (22), (25), and (32).

Narrative events introduced by *nu* or *no* can occur everywhere in an episode, and they mostly ensure topic continuity (17)–(20), (31), and (33).

In evaluations and its continuations, there is a difference, but not between *nu* and *no*, but between Yugan and Tromagan Khanty. While in Yugan *nu/no* appears with modal readings (14), (26), (27) or explanations and additional information to the plot, as well as with repetition or assurance of topic continuity (17), (18), (31), in Tromagan Khanty it also occurs with interruptions by the storyteller providing knowledge or admitting lack of knowledge about the plot (13) and with modal readings (24) and topic continuity (19).

3.5. Short summary of the functions of *nu/no* in narration in Surgut Khanty

Even if the data is not balanced (20 occurrences of *nu*, 17 of *no* in Yugan Khanty versus two occurrences of *nu*, ten of *no* in Tromagan Khanty narration) and limited, some tendencies can be clearly seen regarding the attested functions of the discourse particle(s) (see Table 5). Namely, that there are no significant differences between the two forms *nu* and *no*. The functions of *nu* attested are the same as for *no*, namely the explanatory and modal reading, as well as the introduction of a new topic and topic continuity, and as part of speech disfluency. The only difference worth mentioning is the recapitulative tail-head linkage constructions only attested for *nu*, but I consider this a coincidence due to the small data set. Due to the different languages and storytelling skills of the speakers. *nu/no* in speech disfluency environment is only attested in Yugan Khanty.

Table 5. Functions of *nu/no* in narration.

	Surgut Khanty			
	Yugan Khanty		Tromagan Khanty	
	<i>nu</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>no</i>
explanatory	+	+	+	+
modal	+	+	n. a.	+
new topic	+	+	n. a.	+
topic continuity	+	+	+	+
summarizing	+	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
speech disfluency	+	+	n. a.	n. a.

There are some significant correlations between the place of *nu/no* in the narrative structure and the function it has (see Table 6 for a summary). In some cases, like for the modal function in setting position or in a narrative event or coda, there is just not enough data to pass a definite judgement, but in some other cases, like a new topic in narrative events or coda positions, the correlation is unlikely or even impossible, like topic continuity in the coda or the summarizing function in setting or initial narrative event position. Correlations between functions and positions of the discourse particle *nu/no* in the narrative structure cannot be applied to speech disfluency, which is judged independent of the narrative structure itself.

Even if most of the functions of *nu/no* are attested in the position of the initial narrative event (16), (21), (22), (25), (32), its dominant function is introducing a new topic in a new episode (15), (28)–(30). The less-attested functions are encountered in the coda position, which might be explained by the fact that in Surgut Khanty narratives, the end of the tale is often a one-word expression (cf. *tərəm* ‘The End’ OUDB ID1660) or a fixed formula (cf. *pə:nə i:tpə ʔottəyən* ‘And they live until today’ OUDB ID1533, *v:ritel totti* ‘That’s all of it’ OUDB ID1518; *pə:n tʰu: qoβ jə:səŋ tʰi tərəm ju:s jə:səŋ* ‘And so ended that long story, the legend’ OUDB ID1615). The explanatory reading can be found in all narrative positions (12), (13), (22), (23). This can be explained by the fact that explanations and also speech disfluency are independent from the narrative structure itself.

Table 6. Functions and place of *nu/no* in narrative structure.

	<i>nu/no</i> Surgut Khanty narration				
	setting ⁸	initial narrative event	narrative event	coda	evaluation
explanatory	+	+	+	+	+
modal	n. a.	+	n. a.	n. a.	+
new topic	+	+	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
topic continuity	+	+	+	n. a.	n. a.
summarizing	n. a.	n. a.	+	n. a.	n. a.
speech disfluency	+	+	+	n. a.	n. a.

8 For reasons of clearer presentation, the units of narration setting and continuation of setting are represented in Table 6 as one unit, as well as evaluation and continuation of evaluation; coda and continuation of coda.

4. Conclusion

This paper discussed several questions concerning the discourse particle(s) *nu/no* and *no:* in Surgut (Yugan and Tromagan) Khanty narratives, including the considerable number of constructed dialogues. The corpus used for this study also contains free dialogues connected to the narratives due to the collection and edition methods of the tales and legends.

The three forms of discourse in the narratives analysed (narrations, constructed and free dialogues) were treated separately, but owing to the characteristics of the data (see Table 1), the last two forms could only be described for Yugan Khanty, as *nu/no* and *no:* are not attested in that form in the Tromagan Khanty subcorpus (see Table 3).

Even if the question of whether *nu/no* and *no:* are alike in Yugan Khanty and Tromagan Khanty could not be addressed, it is safe to say that at least *nu* and *no* are more widely used in Yugan Khanty than in Tromagan Khanty. However, this question needs further analysis.

One of the key findings of this paper is that in narratives the discourse particles *nu/no* and *no:* are used by monolingual and bilingual speakers alike.

The firmest finding of this paper concerns the three realisations *nu/no* and *no:* themselves in Surgut (Yugan and Tromagan) Khanty. A clear functional distribution has been established between the form *no:* with the long or overlong vowel (3.1) and the other two forms *nu/no* with short vowels (3.2, 3.3.1, 3.3.2). *no:* always expresses affirmation or confirmation in free dialogues, and exclusively in free dialogues, while *nu/no* has/have other functions as discourse particle(s) in free and constructed dialogues, as well as in narration. One more significant difference is that only *no:* appears in stand-alone position while *nu/no* does not.

Regarding the status of *nu* and *no*, the analysis shows that they are two realisations of one discourse particle *nu/no*. One of their functions in Surgut Khanty narration is summarizing, which, however, is attested only once in the corpus. Despite this and the limited data, it is safe to say that there are no notable differences between the two forms *nu* and *no* in Surgut Khanty narration. Both forms appear almost exclusively in declarative sentences, in sentence-initial position and the same functions have been detected for *nu* and *no* in narration. In the narrative structure, they show the same amount of versatility and the same patterns.

The final conclusion for *nu/no* and *no:* in Surgut Khanty is that there are definitely two different discourse particles: *nu/no* and *no:*. The independence of *nu* and *no* could not be proven, and the findings compel us to treat them as different realisations of one discourse particle.

Acknowledgements

This paper and the research behind it, was supported by the project *The Grammar of Discourse Particles in Uralic* (PRG 1290) funded by the Estonian Research Council at the Finno-Ugric department of the University of Tartu led by Gerson Klumpp. The paper results from my talk entitled *Well, why are they so many? In search of explanations for the abundance of discourse particles in Yugan Khanty* presented at the 14th International Congress for Finno-Ugric Studies in Tartu in August 2025, in the Symposium *Discourse particles in the Uralic languages*. I am deeply thankful to the organizers: Elena Markus, Denys Teptiuk, Triin Todesk, Marili Tomingas, Eda-Riin Tuuling, and Iuliia Zubova, for supporting me. Further, I am grateful for the well-founded remarks of my reviewers, and Jeremy Bradley for his friendly cleaning of my Hungarian.

Above all, I am indebted to all Khanty native speakers, who shared their knowledge with me over the years. My thoughts are always with them.

List of (glossing) abbreviations

1 – first person, 2 – second person, 3 – third person, CAR – caritive, COLL – collective, COM – comitative-instrumental, COP – copula, CVB – converb, DET – demonstrative determiner, DIM – diminutive, DIST – distal, DU – dual, EMPH – emphasis, INF – infinitive, INSC – instructive-final, LAT – lative, LOC – locative, MAN – manner demonstrative, MEL – meliorative, n. a. – not attested, n. k. – not known, NEG – negative/negation, PASS – passive, PFV – perfective, PL – plural, PRON – demonstrative pronoun, PROPR – proprietive, PROX – proximal, PRS – present, PST – past, PTCP – participle, PTCL – particle, Ru. – Russian, SG – singular, TRNS – translativ

References

- Auer, Peter & Yael Maschler. 2016. The family of NU and NĀ across the languages of Europe and beyond: Structure, function, and history. In Peter Auer & Yael Maschler (eds.), *NU/NĀ: A family of discourse markers across the languages of Europe and beyond*, 1–47. Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bolden, Galina B. 2016. The discourse marker *nu* in Russian conversation. In Peter Auer & Yael Maschler (eds.), *NU/NĀ: A family of discourse markers across the languages of Europe and beyond*, 48–81. Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110348989-002>.
- Csepregi, Márta. 2017. *Surgutskij dialekt xantyjskogo jazyka*. Xanty-Mansijsk: Obsko-ugorskij institut prokladnyx issledovanij i razrabotok.
- Csepregi, Márta. 2023. Khanty. In Daniel Abondolo and Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi (eds.), *The Uralic Languages*, 703–752. 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge.
- Csepregi, Márta & Katalin É. Kiss & Zsanett Ferenczi. 2024. *Khanty Database*. Budapest: HUN-REN Research Centre for Linguistics. <https://khantydatabase.nytud.hu> (15 June, 2026)
- Fischer, Kerstin. 2006. Towards an understanding of the spectrum of approaches to discourse particles: Introduction to the volume. In Kerstin Fischer (ed.), *Approaches to Discourse Particles*. Studies in Pragmatics 1, 1–20. Oxford–Amsterdam: Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1163/9780080461588_002.
- Honti, László. 1982. *Chrestomathia Ostiacica*. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó.
- Kugler, Nóra. 2000. A partikula. In Borbála Keszler (ed.), *Magyar grammatika*, 275–281. Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.
- Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, Focus, and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620607>.
- Nikitina, Tatiana. 2024. In search of episodic units: A corpus-based study of Wan and Chuvash. Keynote talk presented at the Workshop on larger discourse units in (spoken) language, CNRS, Villejuif.
- Olguín Martínez, Jesús. 2023. A typological study of tail-head linkage constructions. In Alessandra Barotto & Simone Mattiola (eds.), *Discourse Phenomena in Typological Perspective*. Studies in Language Companion Series 227, 403–432. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.227.14olg>.
- OUDb = Schön Zsófia (ed.), *OUDb Yugan Khanty (2010–) Corpus*. https://oudb.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/?abfrage=YK_corpus&subnavi=corpus_pub (15 June, 2026)
- Schön, Zsófia. 2017. *Personal Archive Schön. Tromagan Khanty narratives*.
- Schön, Zsófia. 2020. (S)he lives with that legend, with that fairytale till today. In *Ёмас самың нэ́кве вóртур ё́тност самың патум – Scripta miscellanea in honorem Ulla-Maija Forsberg*. Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne 275: 348–368. <https://doi.org/10.33341/sus.11.24>.

- Schön, Zsófia. 2022. The locative-marked agent in Yugan Khanty active sentences. A data-driven pilot study. *Nyelvtudományi Közlemények* 118. 89–135. <https://doi.org/10.15776/NYK.2022.118.3>.
- Schön, Zsófia. 2025. *Well, why are they so many? – In search of explanations for the abundance of discourse particles in Yugan Khanty*. Talk presented at the Congressus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum XIV in Tartu, Estonia. 19.08.2025. <https://doi.org/10.33341/sus.11.24>.
- Schön, Zsófia. Forthcoming. *Märchen der Jugan-Chanten*. Fürstenberg: Kulturstiftung Sibirien.
- Schön, Zsófia & Katalin Gugán. 2022. East Khanty. In Marianne Bakró-Nagy, Johanna Laakso & Elena Skribnik (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Uralic Languages*, 608–635. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198767664.003.0032>.
- Steinitz, Wolfgang et al. 1966–1995. *Dialektologisches und etymologisches Wörterbuch der ostjakischen Sprache*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- Tannen, Deborah. 1986. Introducing constructed dialogue in Greek and American conversational and literary narratives. In Coulmas, Florian (ed.), *Direct and indirect speech*, 311–333. Berlin, New York & Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter.
- van Dijk, Teun A. 1981. Episodes as units of discourse analysis. In Tannen, Deborah (ed.), *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*, 177–195. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.

Kokkuvõte. Zsófia Schön: Diskursusepartiklid *nu/no* ja *no*: Surguti handi narratiivsetes tekstides. See andmepõhine uuring uurib diskursusepartiklite *nu/no* ja *no*: erinevusi Surguti (jugani ja tromagani) handi jutustustes. Korpuspõhine lähenemine võtab esmalt arvesse kõiki *nu*, *no* ja *no*: esinemisi andmetes, et tuvastada nende funktsioonid vastavalt nende positsioonile narratiivi struktuuris. Lisaks püüab see vastata küsimusele, kas Surguti handis esinevad kolm vormi *nu*, *no* ja *no*: on ühe diskursusepartikli variandidid või on olulisi erinevusi, mis võimaldavad eristada kahte või kolme diskursusepartiklit. Pärast andmete analüüsimist lausetüübi, süntaktilise positsiooni, koha narratiivi struktuuris ja funktsioonide osas järeldub, et *no*: on oma jaatavate tõlgendustega iseseisev diskursusepartikel, samas kui *nu* ja *no* on liiga sarnased, et neid eraldi käsitleda, ja neid võib pidada ühe diskursusepartikli paralleelvormideks.

Märksõnad: jaatus, modaalne tõlgendus, narratiivi struktuur, NU, tromagani handid, jugani handid